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## Portland's Precision Castparts a rare Oregon manufacturing superstar, but comes at a cost

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By Scott Learn, The Oregonian  
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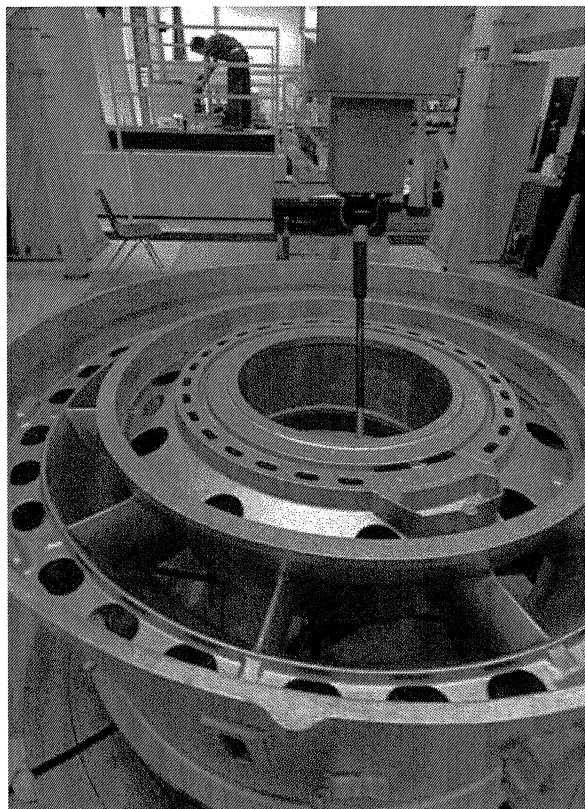
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The Oregonian

Precision Castparts in Clackamas County has built a successful manufacturing business in Oregon over the last 50 years.

Portland-based **Precision Castparts Corp.** is a classic manufacturing success story in a state that badly needs them.

It joins **Nike** as one of two Fortune 500 companies based in Oregon, with more than 100 facilities worldwide, four in the Portland area, and **profits in the hundreds of millions.**

But success -- as with other heavy manufacturers -- comes with environmental costs and worker injuries.

Since 2008, **Oregon OSHA** has twice raised significant safety concerns at the large parts campus in Southeast Portland where hazardous pollution escaped in May. In 2008, an inspection found eight "serious" violations. OSHA issued a hazard letter "to address the disconnect that appears to exist" between daily operations and the safety department.

After two injuries that required hospitalization in 2010, OSHA issued 24 "serious" violations. A report cited "systematic occurrences of electrical hazards" and said the violations indicated "a lack of hazard recognition or a gap in the existing programs for recognizing and controlling the hazards."

The violations ranged from damaged

cords to a high-voltage panel with the door removed.

The campus has had periodic fires; a worker who died in 2001 after falling into a 236-degree caustic part bath; and has accepted workers' compensation claims averaging 49 a year from 2008 to 2010.

Eileen Drake, vice president for administration and legal affairs, said the company hired three



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more safety specialists at Portland-area plants after the 2008 report.

Fines for the 2008 and 2010 citations were at the low end of the serious category, she noted, and all 2010 violations were promptly corrected.

The company's OSHA incident rate is below the industry's average, Drake said, and the air contaminant release in May was the first in company history.

The campus, with buildings totaling more than 600,000-square-feet, is complex, fashioning jumbo parts that require tolerances within 5/10,000s of an inch.

It employs some 1,200 workers on three shifts -- average hourly wage, \$21-plus -- making components for aircraft engines, industrial gas turbines and the military.

Workers shape and weld wax molds, dip them in a secret-recipe slurry, then coat them with sand to create a cast that's filled in 2,000-degree foundries with titanium or steel alloys. Parts are refined in an acidic solution, then tested and x-rayed to spot internal flaws.

The process requires hazardous chemicals. A state fire marshal's tally of substances at the campus includes 16 considered acute health hazards.

In 2010, the campus released 126 tons of air pollutants allowed under its permit, including 53 tons of volatile organic compounds and 24 tons of nitrogen dioxide.

It also faces cleanup of old groundwater contamination from the campus, near Johnson Creek. State officials don't believe it threatens the city of Milwaukie's drinking wells.

OSHA and Oregon's **Department of Environmental Quality** are still investigating the May incident.

DEQ says it likely won't issue fines because the power outage that triggered the release was outside the company's control.

-- **Scott Learn and Natalie Feulner**

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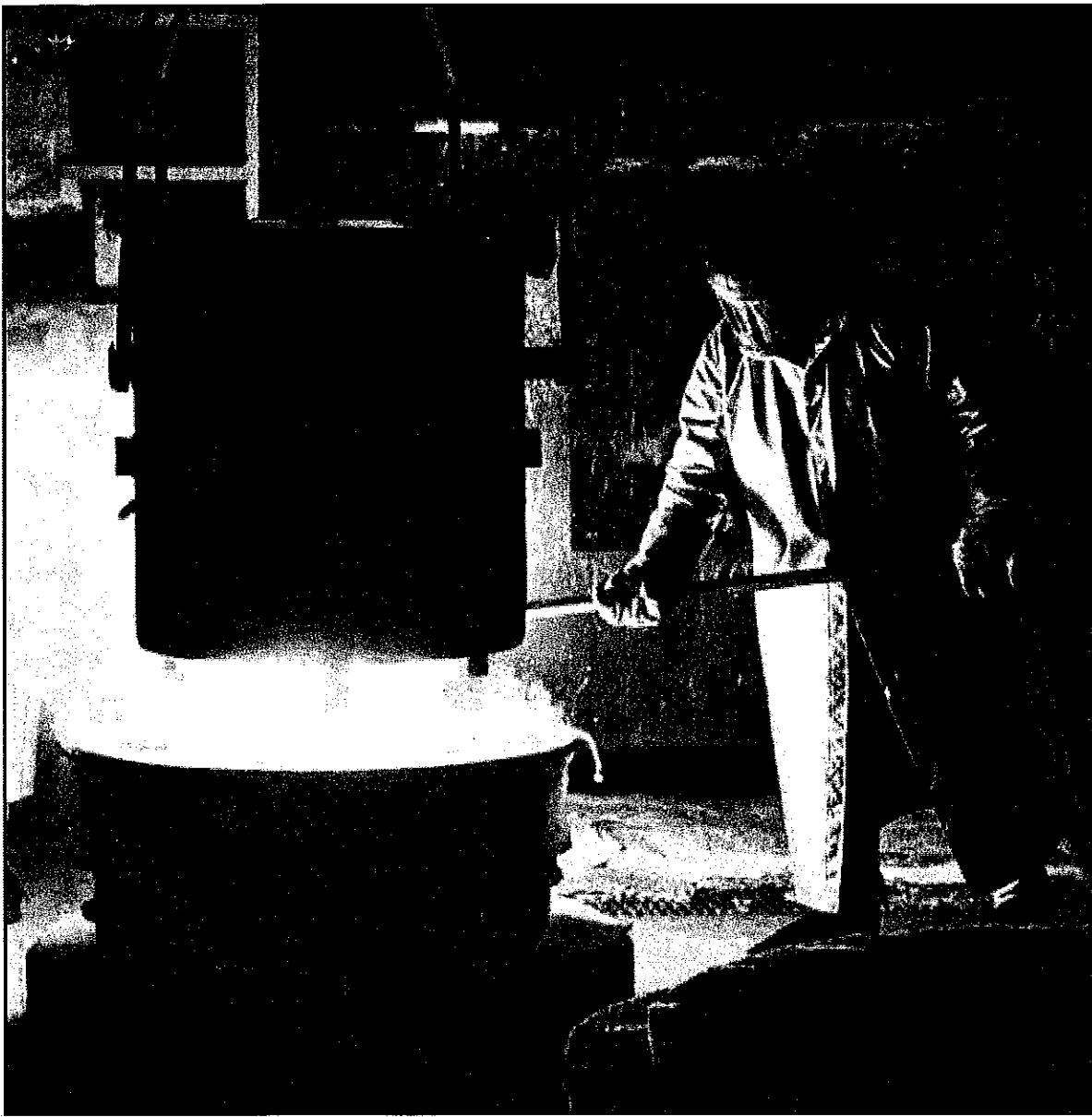
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## **Oregon OSHA again cites PCC for safety problems (US)**

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**Foundry operators at Precision Cast Parts pour molten alloy into the cast for an aerospace part. Parts are then taken to the cleaning department, where they're placed in tanks of caustic chemicals to remove most of the cast ( Credit Photo @ Benjamin Brink, The Oregonian/2011 )**

Oregon OSHA has cited Precision Castparts for 32 violations at its large parts campus in Milwaukie and Southeast Portland, raising significant safety concerns for the third time since 2008. The citations include \$26,050 in penalties related to cleaning operations in the two plants, which make precise steel and titanium components for aircraft engines, industrial gas turbines and the military. None of the violations was considered "willful," the most severe category. But 28 were serious, with nine having the potential to cause death. They stem from a 23-page complaint by Ryan Edwards, a temporary employee in 2011 who submitted the OSHA complaint after first sending it to the company. Some of the violations were repeats, OSHA spokeswoman Melanie Mesaros said, and the company did not correct some significant violations Edwards pointed out until after the OSHA inspection. "Some of their programs were seriously flawed," Mesaros said. "When you have repeat violations and you find problems that aren't being corrected, it's disappointing." Precision Castparts, which has until early March to appeal the penalties, declined to comment in detail. Spokesman Dwight Weber said in an email the company "will continue to work closely with OSHA to provide a safe working environment." Precision Castparts and Nike are the only Fortune 500 companies based in Oregon, with Precision Castparts recently reporting \$307.3 million of net income in its third quarter. It employs up to 1,200 non-union workers at the large parts campus at an average of \$21 an hour plus benefits. OSHA considers it a "high hazard" workplace. The company hit the news last May, when toxic chemicals were released after a power outage and equipment failure. Firefighters ordered nearby residents to shelter in place. No one was injured and the company says the community was never at risk. In 2008, OSHA found eight serious violations at the campus, with more than 600,000 square feet of buildings. OSHA issued a hazard letter "to address the disconnect that appears to exist" between operations and the safety department. After two injuries that required hospitalization in 2010, OSHA issued 24 serious violations. A report cited "systematic occurrences of electrical hazards" and "a lack of hazard recognition or a gap in the existing programs for recognizing and controlling the hazards." The latest inspections occurred from October to December in the cleaning departments. In a letter to Edwards, OSHA said it found his accusation of an "emphasis on getting work done quickly regardless

of worker safety issues” to be “true.” At the plants, workers shape and weld wax molds, dip them in a slurry, then coat them with sand to create a cast that’s filled in 2,000-degree foundries with titanium or steel alloys. In the cleaning departments, the parts are dipped in large tanks of high-temperature caustic chemicals — sodium hydroxide and potassium hydroxide — to remove most of the casting shell. In 2001, a worker died after falling into a tank while trying to remove a stuck part. Workers periodically enter empty tanks to clean them — known as “tank digging.” OSHA said controls that send caustic solution and steam into tanks in the titanium plant weren’t properly locked before workers climbed in last summer, posing a risk of death if they were turned on, and training in the “lock out/tag out” procedures was inadequate. Workers with less than 90 days on the job were assuming the role of tank entry supervisor, sometimes during their first-ever tank entry. Most employees in the cleaning departments are temporary employees, OSHA said.

Among other problems OSHA noted:

\* Worker hoists for “tank digging” were heavily worn and not designed for rescue.

\* Some chemical protective suits in the titanium plant had large holes patched with duct tape. When suits are damaged mid-shift, “employees are forced to work with unprotected sleeves.” \* Floors near tanks were extremely uneven due to shell buildup and deterioration from caustic chemicals, a tripping hazard.

\* Slings or hoists holding parts of up to 1,000 pounds in the steel plant were not blocked or cribbed before workers worked underneath.

The plants’ rates of injuries or illnesses leading to work days lost or restricted is more than double the manufacturing average in Oregon. But they’re lower than averages for some jobs, including roofing contractors, nursing home workers and workers at wood preservation plants. Edwards, 28, said he was offered a full-time job, but declined because of safety concerns. He still talks with workers there and has heard of some improvements in personnel and procedures. @hp-

“Hopefully, I’ve kind of set something in motion,” he said. “Fingers crossed.”

Source : Oregon Live

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